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Source: *International Journal of Critical Diversity Studies*, December 2020, Vol. 3, No. 2, Troubling Seasons of Hate (December 2020), pp. 53-72

Published by: Pluto Journals

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.13169/intecritdivestud.3.2.0053

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Anti-Pinkwashing as Emerging Hope

Queering the Palestinian Liberation Movement in the Context of Institutionalised Neoliberalism

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ABSTRACT

Neoliberal processes take place in rapid compromises with political sovereignties of nations. The only unsovereign political space where neoliberalism is practiced today is Palestine, particularly in the West Bank, since the Oslo peace process. The portrayal of Islam in a certain light is essential to the success of neoliberal practices in the region. In line with this, Israel's official 2007 campaign, "Brand Israel," saw millions of dollars spent for this propaganda. One of the central points is "pinkwashing" where Israel portrays itself as a haven for homosexuals while deliberately glossing over its occupation of Palestine. Israeli occupation does not distinguish between queer and straight. This phenomenon of employing gay rights as political strategy, and in this case anchored in Islamophobia, is termed by theorist Jasbir Puar as "homonationalism." Gender is clearly an organising principle of Israeli repression and what needs to be looked at is whether gender is also an organising principle of Palestinian resistance. The Palestinian queer movement is deeply embedded in anti-pinkwashing activism and differentiates itself from Western notions of queerness. This article applies these crucial understandings to the current context of Palestine because it is a predominantly vibrant, contemporary site.

KEYWORDS

neoliberalism, pinkwashing, homonationalism, anti-pinkwashing

The Palestinian question is one of the most protracted ones in Middle Eastern studies and over the years several new dimensions have been attached to it with a surge of contending analyses. To create an exhaustive list of writers and intellectuals who have contributed to this

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domain will always be a challenge; however, Edward Said, Rashid Khalidi, Ilan Pappe, Norman Finkelstein, Joseph A. Massad, Mahmoud Darwish, Ghassan Kanafani, Sa'ed Atshan, Sahar Khalifeh, Raja Shehadeh, Susan Abulhawa, Jasbir Puar, Maya Mikdashi, Noura Erakat, Suad Amiry, Toufic Haddad, Adam Hanieh, Adel Samara, Dana El Kurd are only a few of those whose works have also influenced the thought process behind this article.

A brief analysis of the history of the Palestine–Israel issue and the phenomenon of neoliberalism is imperative to understand its contemporariness in the context of this article's focus on queering the Palestinian question in the context of institutionalised neoliberalism. This is an analytical study. The methodology used is of an interdisciplinary approach drawing from works on neoliberalism, queer theory, feminism and Palestine studies. A qualitative-analytical approach has been adopted based on primary and secondary sources of information. Certain observations from the two field visits made to Palestine are also referred to.

Neoliberalism broadly represents a set of ideas and practices emerging after the decline of Keynesian economics, the fall of the Eastern bloc, the appearance of a unipolar world order which is dominated by the United States and its allies, and the affiliated international financial institutions (IFIs). It began to materialise in policies of Western governments and IFIs from the mid-1970s and continues until this day (Haddad, 2016). Unlike Palestine, in places where neoliberal strategies have been executed, political sovereignty and independence have been the basic preconditions, although criticised, for voiding out sovereignty. The logic of neoliberalism is based on the assumption that an autonomous, utilitarian and self-maximising subject exists who plays the individual agent participating in markets and warrants their auto-regulation. The central idea guiding neoliberal policies is that of minimum government intervention (Chari, 2015) with the nation-state understood to be a parasitic entity draining out resources meant for public welfare.

The consequences of neoliberalism for human rights are explained by Upendra Baxi (2002) when he notes that the extreme ramification of these processes is the tendency to present the suffering of people as unproblematic. This can be coupled with the wide-scale phenomenon of human rights discourses being increasingly associated with civil society – aspects of which can be seen in the growing NGO-isation of the discourse and the shift from movement-oriented approach to an expanding insistence on a bureaucratic, organisational one with shrinking space for political contestation.

The Palestinian encounter with neoliberalism is complex to decipher, but also necessary because of the extreme and practically experienced manner in which it is formulated in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), and particularly the West Bank under the current political dispensation (Clarno, 2017). Its concurrent overlapping with the agenda of national liberation of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) is something which needs further understanding. This article examines the penetrations of neoliberal concepts and ideas within the current political regime in Palestine and the developmental plan as adopted by it. It problematises the consequences of these neoliberal ideas for the national liberation movement, while further focusing the inquiry on the contemporary gendered struggles of Palestine.

This work attempts to situate the Palestinian queer movement through its anti-pinkwashing activism in the larger context of the political-economic situation in the region. In order to do so, the first section begins with a brief historical study of the Palestine–Israel question, and

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then goes on to discuss the concept and practices of homonationalism and pinkwashing by Israel. This is followed by sections addressing the understanding of Palestinian queer resistance and its practices of anti-pinkwashing activism. These have been contextualised by the political-economic aspects of the Israeli occupation through the lens of neoliberalism, since it has a determining influence on Palestinian organising and resistance.

A Brief History of the Palestine–Israel Question

While the origins of this issue can be dated back to Ottoman rule in the region, only parts of that are relevant for considering the underpinnings of this study are discussed here. In 1917, the British government through the Balfour Declaration[1] facilitated the establishment of a Jewish national home in the land of Palestine. After World War I, Britain occupied Palestine and started ruling it under the mandate system.[2] As a consequence of the Balfour Declaration and sustained Zionist efforts, in Tel Aviv on 14 May 1948, the prominent leader of World Zionist Organisation, David Ben Gurion announced the establishment of the state of Israel (Pappe, 2004). In its declaration as a Jewish state, the remaining Palestinian citizens were not recognised as its citizens. To the Palestinians, this came to be called and experienced as *al-nakba*: the disaster or catastrophe. The people of Palestine were forced into exile from their space and time, and this still continues. A variant of colonialism emerged in the form of settler colonialism with the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 on the land of Palestine. For Palestine, there has been no "postcolonial" phase even after the British left their land.

More than seven decades since the *nakba*, an independent – on the ground and not only on papers of international treaties, conventions and resolutions – state of Palestine does not exist. In the following two decades after 1948, it was Yasser Arafat and his faction of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) that successfully managed to revive the Palestinian cause. The PLO came to be recognised as the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinians by other governments in the region and also by most states internationally.

After the 1967 War when Israel occupied the West Bank, Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, Golan Heights and Sinai Peninsula (Pappe, 2006), and the increasing brutalities of occupation – like house demolitions, settlements, arbitrary killings, uprooting trees, cutting off essential supplies, multiple checkpoints, restricted movement, arrests without charges – the anger, resentment, disappointment and frustration among the Palestinians increased in manifold ways. The first *intifada* (uprising) in 1987 was a consequence of this. This uprising saw wide-scale popular participation of Palestinians across all classes and sexes (Pappe, 2006) in mass demonstrations, boycotts, strikes and sit-ins. This was followed by the Oslo peace process beginning in the year 1991 and the Oslo Accords which were signed between the PLO (Arafat) and Israel (Yitzhaq Rabin) in 1993 (Khalidi, 2006). As a result of this, the Palestinian Authority (PA), dominated by Fatah, was formed in the West Bank and Gaza Strip – of which only 17 percent of the West Bank was assigned to the PA for administration (Khalidi, 2006). The Oslo peace process has been viewed critically by several scholars and activists, with Edward Said being one of its strongest, most vocal opponents,[3] as an unsuccessful and meek attempt by the PLO to address the conflict between Israel and Palestine, solely on terms dictated by Israel and the USA. The Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) elections in 2006 and the victory of the radical Islamist organisation Hamas in the Gaza Strip are seen as a fallout of the Fatah-dominated PLO's extremely expensive shortcomings.

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The Oslo peace process (1993–2000), its failure (2000–2004) and attempts to revive it (2005 to present) go hand in hand with the application of neoliberal ideas in the region under the political regime of the Mahmoud Abbas-led PA. Several intellectuals (see Toufic Haddad, Adel Samara and Adam Hanieh) in this area of research see the entire peace process – in the way that it was conceptualised and its approaches to conflict resolution – as being consistent with the framework of neoliberalism. This can be further seen in the context of the number of Jewish settlers doubling in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) in the period between 1993–2000 (Hanieh, 2013). The OPT today is one of the most "aid dependent" (Haddad, 2016) regions across the globe. Along with the PA, many development organisations receive this aid, which includes local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the World Bank, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and funders like USAID. The World Bank, which is at the heart of neoliberal advocacy, is extremely active in the OPT. In the past 24 years the OPT has been the highest per capita recipient of aid internationally. According to the World Bank, the OPT is the site which has seen its largest intervention. Since 2007, approximately 30 World Bank projects have been approved in the region and there has been no parliamentary oversight (Haddad, 2016).

The unsuccessful attempts at addressing the conflict and, more importantly, the continued occupation of Palestinian lives through the Oslo Accords, led to the second *intifada* from the year 2000, at the heart of which were Hamas-orchestrated suicide bombings (Said, 2007). Until the emergence of Hamas on the Palestinian political scene, the PLO had for decades remained an uncontested representative of Palestine and the national movement. Today, Mahmoud Abbas is the head of the PA in the West Bank, while Hamas, along with severe Israeli occupational activities, continue to administer the Gaza Strip. The latest in this trend comes with Israel announcing its plans to illegally annex parts of the West Bank in the first week of July 2020, which confirms the apprehensions of many Palestinian stakeholders towards the Oslo peace process. Even though Israel announced its steps to annex parts of the West Bank only recently, it has consistently worked toward altering the facts on the ground through wide-scale expansion of illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank. A visit to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN-OCHA) in East Jerusalem, Palestine, in 2019 confronted me with some stark data on settlements. For example, there are approximately 250 illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank, with a total of about 600,000 Israeli settlers (UN-OCHA, n.d.). The wide-scale expansion of settlements and the construction of several new ones was also difficult to ignore during a 2019 visit, as compared to the previous visit in 2016.

Against this backdrop, the Palestinian feminist movement has strived for the inclusion of women in the nationalist struggle, while also striving for their liberation from patriarchal oppression. Joseph Massad (2008), in a study of Palestinian nationalism and masculinity, concluded that when the activism of Palestinian women gets recognised it is not as Palestinian women fighting for women's rights in Palestine, but as Palestinian women struggling for discursively constituted Palestinian rights, where the domain of "Palestinian" is invariably assumed and imagined in the masculine (Massad, 2008). In the 1987 uprising (*intifada*), the women's movement, like other mass-based organisations, was able to respond to people's aspirations for independence with decentralised forms of organisation and mobilisation (Peteet, 1991) that

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integrated national and social liberation. For Palestinian women, inclusion within the nationalist framework during the *intifada* provided an outlet for political agency that was previously unavailable. The extension of women's roles in the first *intifada* was possible because the division between combatants and non-combatants was not watertight. In the second *intifada* that began in the year 2000, combatants were highly defined by gender and age (Peteet, 1991). The social and economic consequences of Israel's repression of the *intifada* have also differentially affected women in different settings. In the first *intifada*, the site of struggle was the community, the streets, neighborhoods and homes. Women participated in direct confrontation with the Israeli army, whether as demonstrators, stone throwers, or protectors and rescuers of young men. In the second *intifada*, the uprising took place at the borders of Palestinian towns, at the limits of Palestinian sovereignty. In this context, women's role in direct resistance was minimal given the absence of community context and the militarised environment.

The conventional imagination of the conflict between Israel and Palestine in terms of an inter-state conflict excludes the many voices of dissent, particularly those of women and other gendered minorities. It follows from the practice and norms of international politics where government representatives are considered to be the sole actors in inter-state politics, and hence automatically excludes those individuals who do not conform to the mainstream community of citizens. This formation of the other, like the other exclusionary practices, is also gendered.

Settler colonial nationalism, like that of Israel, is characteristic of the sexual imagination of the land as the virgin mother. The Zionist slogan widely referred to, of Palestine being "a land without people for a people without land"[4] is synonymous with this form of settler colonialism. Massad (2007b) provides an example suggesting this imagination by citing Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir's response to a Jew returning from Palestine who exclaimed that the bride was beautiful but already has a bridegroom. Golda Meir responded by saying that God needs to be thanked for the bridegroom being so weak that the bride could be taken away from him (Massad, 2007b, p. 33). Palestinian nationalism is characterised as anti-colonial nationalism, and the most natural fallout of this form of nationalism is the binary of tradition/modernity where the population seeking national liberation is restricted between the contradictions of reclaiming past traditional culture and also adapting to the challenges and boons of an increasingly modernising world.

Palestine remains an ongoing quest for national liberation. And so does the quest for the liberation of Palestinian women and gendered minorities. Patriarchy as a form of political organisation and power has been visible on the surface of political life in most nations. Neoliberal processes affect feminist discourses and the manner in which the discourse is formulated. For example, the key feminist construct of "the personal is political" takes a backseat when the collective public domain of politics is reduced to the personal. Understanding the phenomena of oppression and exploitation as collective, systemic processes that are gendered and raced is affected when neoliberal narratives block the prominence of collective experience (Fraser, 2013) and turn it into a commodity for consumption. One of these neoliberal tools of the Israeli occupation is its practice of the phenomenon of homonationalism, which is specifically targeted at Palestinian gendered minorities and largely at Palestinian society. This is discussed in the following sections.

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A Note on Terminology and Complexities of Translation

Sexualities emerge and grow in various directions as they navigate borders. The politics of sexuality is thoroughly altered in the process of translation; as translation is a political act in itself, within which lie acts of displacing, transgression and appropriation. For example, the acronym of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) does not aptly suffice in the Japanese context, as the letter "L" does not exist in the Japanese language (Cottet & Picq, 2019, p. 1). Hence, translating sexualities in international politics pushes one to confront notions of emancipation–colonisation, sovereignty–interference, among which global narratives are locally welcomed or repelled.

LGBT remains the most commonly used umbrella term in the global framework of gender and sexuality, even though it has its reductionist problems as it leaves out a host of identities like intersex, queer, and questioning. While using the term "queer" opens up innumerable possibilities as the term is intrinsically one that challenges any form of determinism, it only exists in the English language and therefore it is important to be critical of the use. Acknowledging the fluidity and heterogeneity of lived experiences, while also maintaining that some or most of these experiences are impossible to translate, is the engagement behind the use of specific terminologies in this work.

The three central Palestinian organisations at the heart of the Palestinian movement for sexual and gender diversity and resistance against Israeli occupation – Al Qaws, Aswat and Palestinian Queers for Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (PQ-BDS) – all employ varied terminologies. Al Qaws specifies its goal as to "engage and support individuals – including but not limited to, those who identify as LGBT and queer – around diverse lived experiences of gender and sexuality" (Al Qaws, n.d.). Aswat focuses on "enhancing the visibility of and empowering Palestinian LBTQIA+ women and trans" (Aswat, n.d.). And lastly, the PQ-BDS employs the term "queer" to associate their activities with the gender and sexual diversity movement as well as the resistance against Israeli occupation. In this article, "queer" is the terminology that has been used, as that is one term commonly employed by all three central Palestinian queer rights organisations. Since a lot of their work is referred to here, it is only for the purpose of clarity that this term has been zeroed in upon, while maintaining that it is not a comprehensive one representative of the entire sexual and gender spectrum, in addition to the limits of translation that it possesses.

It also needs to be specified here that considerable sections of the following discussions rely predominantly on Jasbir Puar's works on homonationalism (e.g., Puar, 2007) and Joseph Massad's works on the "gay international" (e.g., Massad, 2008). This is because both of these significantly delve into the context of Palestine-Israel, in addition to theoretically conceptualising the phenomena of homonationalism and the "gay international." These are considered as works of extreme importance and relevance, while additional literature on the specific context of Palestine–Israel remains sparse.

Homonationalism

In the current context, judging a country's modernity is dependent on its acceptance of homosexuality, thus reinstalling colonial violence, replacing the "woman question" with "homosexual question." In the case of Palestine–Israel, it exposes how gay rights are used as

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political strategy anchored in Islamophobia, even though Israeli occupation does not distinguish between queer and straight. This is the phenomenon that is termed homonationalism by queer theorist Jasbir Puar (2007). Her analysis provides important tools to devise a comprehensive queer politics that stands out from the politics of wars, especially the war on terror. The latter relies on an enforced distinction between the West that is tolerant and an Islamic world that is its opposite, with uniform injustice meted out to women and queers.

Homonationalism traces the ways in which neoliberal political arrangements intend to explore questions of sexual variance and gender nonconformity. A neoliberal state apparatus like that of Israel and its extension in the OPT thrives on certain manufactured perceptions of how the state is characterised. The increasing income inequality and widening gap in social classes runs parallel to the image of the state being a "modern" one in its approaches toward people on the margins, such as gendered minorities. Homonationalism as a phenomenon is one of the driving forces of the ways neoliberalism constructs its subjects. Therefore, it is bound to be experienced by most societies, nations and peoples, whether they are in favour of the phenomenon or otherwise. A recent, relevant example here is India where a constitutional provision and a clause of the Indian Penal Code, namely Article 370 (special status for the state of Jammu and Kashmir) and Section 377 (criminalising homosexuality) respectively, have been withdrawn in the past two years. With this, an argument began floating around that queer Kashmiris now have the rights to their identity. This conveniently brushes under the carpet the decades-long oppression of Kashmiris by the Indian state, most recently with a communications blackout that has lasted a year and which particularly affects the queer community when the only safe space of the internet is taken away. This marks the incipient convergence of homonationalism and pinkwashing in India in recent years (Gawande, 2019).

A historical understanding of the practice of homonationalism by Israel suggests a prospering network of homosexual rights with greater visibility for queers, while simultaneously escalating the systemic segregation and prevention of physical movement of Palestinians (and hence Palestinian homosexuals), especially since the Oslo peace process. It is challenging to conceptualise non-heterosexuality in the Middle East without emulating the colonial presumptions and missionary rhetoric of the West. It is pertinent to question what type of discursive tools gender nonconforming ("queer") Muslims and Arabs are employing to fight violence propagated by the state and society. Queerness inherently stands opposed to a strict, defined method of conduct and there is no pre-existing system that accommodates the interconnections and inconsistencies in a neat, watertight compartment. In 2006, Jerusalem was selected to host the World Pride event (Puar, 2007) which was opposed by several queer organisations and collectives because having it in Jerusalem would mean no presence of queer Palestinians. They stood opposed to pitting queer festivities against Palestinians' freedom. In hosting the event in Jerusalem, Israel would promote itself as a liberal, progressive, free society while brushing under the carpet its miserable human rights record in addition to the violent schisms between the ultra-orthodox and queer Jews. It also implied that Israeli queers' struggle is a natural, genuine and well-founded one based on sovereignty, while that of the Palestinians' is persistently viewed through the lens of religious extremism and not their struggle for statehood, or simply even a space for practicing queer politics.

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Another indication of the various layers of interconnections and inconsistencies was the 2005 "Free Palestine" rally in London, called "Out-Rage!," which claimed to fight against both homophobia and Islamophobia. The participants in the rally held posters saying "Israel: stop persecuting Palestine! Palestine: stop persecuting queers!", "Stop 'honour' killing women and gays in Palestine" (Puar, 2007, p. 17). The act of equating such slogans needs to be problematised. They work to fortify the meanings attached to religions and places as being either modern or traditional, while also equating the oppression of queers in Palestine with the Israeli occupation of Palestine. This fades away the systemic persecution of queer Palestinians by the state of Israel and the persecution of queer Israelis by Israel. The history of colonialism and its socio-economic and cultural domination needs to be held accountable to understand the constant navigation of these structures of power by the colonised masses.

The prototype of gay liberation has constructed many irksome anecdotes around the preeminent homophobia of non-Westerners (people of colour), their rigid familial values and, more significantly, about certain standards and regulations of coming out. These have overshadowed a deeper need to address queerness as a biopolitical design which runs parallel and intersects with culture, the dominance and influence of whiteness, and its interconnectedness with liberationist patterns. This can be further understood by taking into account what theorist Joseph A. Massad highlights in his book *Desiring Arabs*. He writes that the West creates a "gay international" system of standard norms and procedures for queers worldwide to abide by (Massad, 2008, p. 160). For example, this system dictates that "coming out" is a compulsory procedure to be followed by queers. Massad discusses in his work that the socio-political histories and the current context of the Arab world is completely overlooked by such a colonial system, and that the priorities and procedures of queer politics in the Arab world are different from that of the West and its construct of "gay international." Homonationalism then is one of the facets of the "gay international" that strives to situate queer politics within the neoliberal paradigm.

This understanding of the "gay international" can also be associated with Judith Butler's work where she discusses lesbian and gay international rights:

> *One of the central tasks of lesbian and gay international rights is to assert in clear and public terms the reality of homosexuality, not as an inner truth, not as a sexual practice, but as one of the definite features of the social world in its very intelligibility . . . indeed the task of international lesbian and gay politics is no less than a remaking of reality, a reconstituting of the human, and a brokering of the question, what is and not livable? (2004, pp. 29–30)*

Here, she is calling for the internationalisation of Western sexual ontology while also being wary about the ramifications of international human rights discourse. She continues:

> *An anti-imperialist or, minimally, non-imperialist conception of international human rights must call into question what is meant by the human and learn from the various ways and means by which it is defined across cultural venues. This means that local conceptions of what is human, or indeed, of what the basic conditions and needs of a human life are, must be subjected to reinterpretation, since there are historical and cultural circumstances in which the human is defined differently. (Butler, 2004, p. 37)*

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Even though the contextualisation of the 'human' in the human rights discourse and its subjectivity is something Butler stresses, her insistence on the project of international lesbian and gay rights to redefine the 'human' does not leave much space for non-Western ideas of homosexuality and queerness to play a determining role. This is because, as Massad's 2008) work brings out, the categorisations of gay and lesbian cannot be considered universal.

Another relevant intervention in this regard is by Diana Fuss (1995) who questions if it is even possible to think of homosexuality, heterosexuality, or bisexuality as comprehensive, global categories. She suggests that these are generalisations drawn from the specific forms that sexuality adapts to within the system of Western capitalism (Fuss, 1995, p. 159). To think of these conceptions then as an all-encompassing notion of sexuality is to perform an act of colonisation on the non-West, non-hegemonic patterns of sexual difference. These patterns are influenced by the process of identification, which Fuss (1995) explains as "both voluntary and involuntary, necessary and difficult, dangerous and effectual, naturalizing and denaturalizing. Identification is the point where the physical/social distinction becomes impossibly confused and finally untenable" (1995, p. 10). Hence, to overlook all the complexities of this process, and to push the assimilationist tendencies of the "gay international" onto communities who do not identify as such, only aid in the project of homonationalism.

The state of Israel therefore can be understood in certain ways as taking the lead in practicing homonationalism since it stands in a place specific only to itself: one at the intersections of neo-colonialism, settler state and harboring of neoliberal tendencies. The advancement of homosexual rights in Israel began in the late 1980s when Palestine was seeing its historic first *intifada* against the occupation. One of the major reasons for this advancement was homosexuals gaining legitimacy in the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF), with homosexuality being legalised in the organisation and protection against discrimination provisions in several legislative amendments. This made the IDF a distinct site of homonationalism as it began projecting itself as the only country in the region where gay officers could serve the nation (Massad, 2007b). This makes an ideal recipe for the normalisation of homosexuality only by means of national inclusion. It is pertinent to mention here that the early days of Zionism saw the "effeminate Jew" as being contradictory to the Zionist project (Massad, 2007b) and homosexuality was thought to be an orientalist (hence, Arab) depravity. The experience of Ita Segev, an Israeli performance artist, suggests that these ideas still make their presence felt in certain ways. "She was indoctrinated into being an Israeli man . . . and when you are from a society that raises boys to be soldiers, trans femininity is inherently a betrayal of the state" (Dommu, 2019). This is despite the fact that the reformation project of the state of Israel attempts to embrace the potential of the muscular Jew to be the muscular homosexual Jew.

The incipient field of queer studies found itself facing being appropriated by a global LGBT movement that was fast turning into the mainstream and assimilationist in its "civilizing mission" through embracing pro-marriage and pro-military politics (Duggan, 2002, pp. 175–194). The consequences of this for queer Palestinian resistance to the occupation, as well as gendered violence by the Palestinian community itself, is grave. These seemingly reformative trends further marginalise queer Palestinians by indirectly laying the onus on

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them and Palestinian society at large to struggle toward becoming a gender-inclusive society. It completely overshadows the fact that this can only happen in a liberated space where the freedom to organise, debate and develop an understanding for gender inclusivity exists. This is certainly not currently the case for any of the Palestinian communities fragmented under different colonial contexts. Queer Palestinian resistance activities then have to keep focusing on dismantling this narrative of a gender-inclusive Israeli state. The next sections discuss the discourse of pinkwashing and the queer Palestinian resistance that is embedded in anti-pinkwashing activism.

Discourse of Pinkwashing

The phenomena of homonationalism and pinkwashing are linked and pinkwashing is a materialisation of the former. While pinkwashing is practiced as state-level policy, homonationalism is a set of socio-political and religious-cultural structures that enables pinkwashing. Some of these are the merging of state practices, transnational circuits of queer commodity culture and human rights paradigms, and broader global phenomena such as the increasing entrenchment of Islamophobia (Massad, 2015). These are just some of the circumstances through which nation-states are now vested with the status of "gay-friendly" versus "homophobic." It is thus important to map out the relations between pinkwashing and homonationalism, or, more precisely, the global conditions of homonationalism that make a practice such as Israeli pinkwashing possible and legible in the first place, by connecting it to a broader global system of power networks.

Historically speaking, settler colonialism has a long history of articulating its violence through the protection of certain figures such as women and children (Moghadam, 1994), and now homosexuals. Pinkwashing is just one more justification for imperial violence within this long tradition which works in part by tapping into the discursive and structural circuits produced by the West against the danger of "Islamic extremism." In persistence of this imperial tradition, Gayatri Spivak's (2010) well-known precept "white men saving brown women from brown men" (p. 57) gets modified with the trope of white homosexuals saving brown homosexuals from brown heterosexuals (Morris, 2010). Further, the neoliberal economic structure comfortably stretches itself to induce a compartmentalised sort of marketing of various ethnic and minoritised groups (Fraser, 2013). Thus it normalises the production of, for example, a gay and lesbian tourism industry built on the distinction between "gay-friendly" and homophobic destinations. The human rights groups voicing homosexual concerns continue to proliferate Western constructs of identity that privilege identity politics, "coming out", increased visibility, and legislative measures as the dominant scales of social inclusion and progress.

Pinkwashing also entails justifying the Israeli occupation of Palestine by portraying it as a backward place full of homophobic fanatics. The term pinkwashing has frequently been used to refer to the desperate and ironic advancement of homosexual rights being promoted as synonymous with Israeli democracy. In doing so, it becomes a process of systematic wiping out of hierarchies and power relations through the seemingly soft stance of patronising the "safe haven for queers" symbolism. This also tempers the hard-won progresses made by the Israeli queer rights movement. An orientalist construction that lies at the basis of this

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process is of a Palestine that is a threat to homosexuals, notwithstanding any discussion about the homophobia present in Israeli society as well as the existence of Palestinian queer rights organisations. A classic example of the orientalist trope is when, a few years into the "Brand Israel" campaign, the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu proclaimed to the US Congress that the Middle East was "a region where women are stoned, gays are hanged, Christians are persecuted" (Schulman, 2011).

Haneen Maikey (2012), a pioneering Palestinian LGBT rights activist, explains that, apart from branding and projecting Israel as the best destination for queer tourists from across the globe, pinkwashing has severe implications for Palestinian queers who are its primary targets. By reproducing orientalist images of Palestinian homophobia, this process does not take into account the effects of colonial occupation on the degeneration and confinement of socio-cultural norms, models and values. Pinkwashing discourses project Tel Aviv as a paradise for homosexuals, where Tel Aviv is equivalent to the whole of Israel, and thus effaces the ethnic cleansing of Arabs that has been taking place for decades. It can be understood as a preemptive system of securitisation in the form of a campaign, project and a strategy like the 2005 marketing campaign "Brand Israel" (Maikey, 2012). A significant part of this project was to run several million-dollar campaigns to brand the city of Tel Aviv as an international homosexual vacation destination, and hence, gay rights began to be used more as a public relations tool.

While Israel has received several titles and honours since 2000 for being the "gay haven" and "world's pride: Tel Aviv", it has also passed laws and made amendments to others that enable enforced segregation of Palestinians from the West Bank from their spouses residing in Israel. In this context, Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2009) explains that the citizenship law ratified by the Israeli Parliament entails the prohibition of Palestinian spouses or children of Israeli citizens from obtaining Israeli citizenship or permanent residency in the state. These laws attempt to monitor sexual activities between workers coming to Israel and Israeli Jews – such regulations over heterosexual reproduction are eclipsed in the pinkwashed narratives of homosexual liberation. Natalie Hamou (2011) breaks down the intricacies of these arrangements. The legalisation of surrogacy for families formed through homosexual relationships has gained ground as a rights issue in Israel, superseding debates over same-sex marriage as that is met with challenges because there does not exist a civil marriage code in Israel and the religious marriage code is the only one (Weiss & Gross-Horowitz, 2012). Strangely, a majority of homosexual couples in Israel have children, except for Palestinian Arab homosexual couples. To be a homosexual in Israel requires fulfilling several criteria: Jewish, able-bodied, to become parents and reproduce only along racial lines. A meeting with representatives from the Palestinian legal rights group Adalah in Haifa, Israel in 2019 suggested that there are over sixty-five laws in place in Israel, that directly or indirectly discriminate against the Palestinian-Arab residents of Israel (Adalah, n.d.). And among these residents are, of course, also those queer Palestinians who are claimed to be "rescued and saved" by Israel. Pinkwashing as a discourse not only keeps alive the narrative of homophobic Palestinians, but it also obliterates the fact that Israel's concern over homosexuality is overtaken by its concern over pronatalism and racialised reproduction (Maikey, 2012). This process makes a deliberate attempt to instil vagueness in the projection of fierce control over reproduction, cutting across divisions of homosexuality and heterosexuality.

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Palestinian Queer Resistance in Anti-Pinkwashing Activism

Anti-pinkwashing activism ought to focus on breaking down the complex apparatuses in order to demonstrate the presentation of the state of Israel as seemingly modern, tolerant and progressive. This is as important a task as it is to posit Israel as a state practicing homonationalism against which resistance in the form of anti-pinkwashing activism must be organised. The goals of this as observed by organisations working in this regard are to build links between sexual politics and queer activism as intrinsic to the Palestinian struggle for liberation, and to establish a discourse of homosexuality and queer activism that is not hyphenated from anti-colonial struggles, and struggles against neoliberalism and racism (Maikey, 2012).

Some of the most active organisations in anti-pinkwashing activism are Aswat, Al-Qaws and the Palestinian Queers for BDS. As part of their strategies, they resist the dominant international LGBT rights agendas and paradigms like legalisation of same-sex marriages. Pinkwashing discourse legitimises itself through fading out the geographical rationale of dominance and control by the occupation forces and the sophisticated system of apartheid positing a bewildering design of physical obstructions to Palestinian mobility, among other such challenges. For example, Palestinian queers are unable to travel from Ramallah to Jerusalem or Haifa, to meet with fellow Palestinian activists. This is a systematic prohibition by Israel on the prospects and opportunities for the thriving of queer organising and activism – something that flourished for Israelis in the absence of any restraints on mobility. As studied by the UN-OCHA in East Jerusalem, there are more than 700 obstacles (including 60 fully staffed checkpoints) impeding free movement of Palestinians in the West Bank (Ofir, 2019). This is aided by the permit system where Palestinians need to obtain permits from Israeli authorities in order to move from one place to another. My personal experience at airport immigration in Tel Aviv in 2019 was very intimidating. I was kept waiting for several hours before I was interrogated by the Israeli authorities about my visit. This was because I had previously visited Palestine in 2016 and had entered the West Bank via Jordan. After having spent close to five hours at immigration, the Israeli authorities specifically threatened me not to enter any part of Palestine even though I possessed all the required documents.

The whole of the West Bank has been divided into Areas A, B and C under the Oslo Accords, and each of these areas have their own respective arrangements with regards to jurisdiction, movement, economy and business. The Oslo Accords took away the notion of a shared vision and shared destiny for the entire Palestinian masses. The years following Oslo have led to differentiated struggles of Palestinians, separated by the various physical and psychological boundaries owing to the occupation. Palestinian refugees in the diaspora, Palestinians in Gaza, Palestinians in the OPT, Palestinian citizens of Israel and Palestinians in Jerusalem – each of these peoples have their micro struggles against the Israeli occupation which ought to be connected to the macro liberation struggle for Palestine. The denial of unity of these scattered groups of Palestinians is the predominant logic of the contemporary colonial practices of Israel. The unabated construction of illegal settlements in the OPT, restrictions on the freedom of movement of Palestinians and control over Palestinian economic life together form a complex apparatus of control, all stemming from the Oslo Accords.

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Attributing allegations of discrimination against homosexuals in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to Palestinian society overlooks the ubiquitous and perpetual regulations on physical movement, organic contact and organising (Maikey, 2012) – all of which are essential processes and activities for building a model of queer activism and politics. When this is deliberately ignored, the occupation and its discriminatory practices are shielded from being held directly liable for threatening homosexual rights activities and lives. Therefore, reclaiming indigenous queer histories and their suppression by neo-colonial mechanisms, alongside upholding that neoliberal models of LGBT liberation of the West are a manifestation of neo-colonialism, is what Palestinian queer resistance aims to work toward. It was Western colonial practices and identity politics that first outlawed queerness and, to reclaim and resist it, queer activism needs to have its base in decolonisation (Massad, 2007a, p. 48).

Anti-pinkwashing activism challenges the absence or non-acknowledgement of the existence of a legitimate Palestinian homosexual – unless they exist within the borders of the state of Israel, where they are constructed as "rescued beings" (Maikey, 2012). The image of the Palestinian queer being a collaborator with the state of Israel was constructed during the first *intifada*, and this image is yet to fade away. All organising efforts for homosexual rights focus on deconstructing the image of being a collaborator with Israel, instead of organising for sexual liberation. Current efforts in anti-pinkwashing measures assert the authenticity of the queer/homosexual Palestinian in order to make that identity legitimate. The risk here lies in falling into the colonial trope of Massad's (2008) "gay international" by failing to question the perplexed social realities in which the homosexual/queer is formed in occupied societies like Palestine.

The specific spatial coordinates of the Palestine–Israel question can be traced to settler colonialism in 1948, occupation in 1967 and apartheid since early 1990s and the Oslo peace process. There was an innate distinction in the understanding between how statehood was conceptualised by Palestinians and Western governments. For Palestinians, the process started by ending the occupation in the first place, and then actualising national self-determination. For Western governments, it meant installing the institutional and security regimes required to form security for Israel and economic security for the Palestinians (Pappe, 2014), hoping this would lead to political stability. The Palestinian national policy objectives, as described by the Abbas government, are: safety and security, good governance, increased national prosperity, enhanced quality of life (Haddad, 2016) and hence the language of resistance changes from a rights-based one to a goal-based one which is equivalent to any independent country's developmental policy goals. In this, there is a paradigmatic shift ignoring the historical rights and struggle of the national liberation movement. This situates Palestine–Israel as the only site where these inter-related patterns of power operate. As an elaborate territorial project, this also violates the neoliberal rationale of homosexual/queer accommodationism, as priority is given to only certain racialised homosexual bodies to be assimilated into the project and not all. In accordance with this multi-layered structure, linking sex, gender nonconformity, sexual freedom and the best technological advancements in the field of reproductive aids, any anti-pinkwashing effort needs to address the biopolitics of reproduction and transformation.

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Anti-pinkwashing and queer rights activism has been picking up tremendously in recent years. In 2019, a Palestinian teen was severely stabbed near Tel Aviv (a gay haven according to the "Brand Israel" campaign), allegedly by his own brother based on perceived sexual and gender identity. This snowballed into unprecedented protest actions across Palestinian communities in the West Bank and Israel (Ziv, 2019). This was also the first time there was widespread reporting by the media on an incident of violence against the queer community in Palestine. A statement by Al Qaws, the organisation at the heart of the movement that followed, read:

> *This attack exposed how complicit our society is in covering up and legitimizing violence against LGBTQ people. Furthermore, this crime and the subsequent social reaction reemphasizes how much the violence against LGBTQ people in Palestine cannot be divorced from violence against women or ongoing colonial violence including Pinkwashing. (Al Qaws, 2019)*

A rallying point in this movement was seen in placards with slogans calling for the freedom of Palestinian queers to not align with their occupiers, as collectively building a gender- and sexuality-diverse civil society was the only solution. This was a watershed moment in the Palestinian queer movement as it saw very public protest actions that continued for several days, assertively calling for a resilient struggle for a free Palestine for all. This was also followed by similar protest actions in August 2020 against a Palestinian company called Al Arz that produces tahini. Its owner donated to an Israeli LGBTQ organisation, The Aguda, to put in place a hotline for queer Palestinians in Israel (Atshan, 2020). This was opposed mainly because a Palestinian hotline run by Al Qaws and Aswat already exists, and they saw this as another act of pinkwashing. These organisations also laid blame on international media agencies like the *New York Times* for erasing the existence of such Palestinian hotline services from their coverage and they called for the boycott of the Al Arz tahini products (Masarwa & Benoist, 2020). While there were some from the queer Palestinian community who supported this act, this just indicates the predominant heterogeneity among queer Palestinians and, more importantly, an increasing openness regarding issues of Palestinian queer communities and activism around it.

A closer understanding of Al Qaws as an organisation gives perspective on the larger workings of the Palestinian queer struggle. It structures itself as a queer, feminist, anti-colonial organisation that aims to build a politically queer grassroots movement in Palestine, connect to queer Palestinians in the diaspora, confront pinkwashing and hostility towards the queer community from within the Palestinian society and enable the use of artistic expression in the movement. In this, Al Qaws attempts to be a political home for those who want to reconcile being Palestinian and queer. It also works through cultural production for social change, as one of its projects is making music, art and using humour to address the trauma they hold and channel it into their activism.

After its central role in the movement following the stabbing of the Palestinian youth near Tel Aviv in 2019, Al Qaws faced a temporary ban by the PA. According to a police statement, this was for going against "traditional Palestinian values" and also encouraging "citizens to report suspicious figures attempting to provoke and harm the Palestinian social

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fabric" (Ashly, 2019a). This led to Al Qaws being at the receiving end of several intimidation tactics including hate speech, threats of arrests and death threats. The ban was later lifted because of the huge backlash the PA faced but this entire episode left queer Palestinians feeling extremely vulnerable and unsafe. It is relevant to cite Dana El Kurd's (2019) work here because she focuses on how the PA acts as a tool of Israeli occupation. In her work she explains why are there no mass protests in Palestine today like the ones during the *intifada* years. The PA as an indigenous authoritarian authority has a very different effect than the Israeli colonial authority. In the pre-Oslo years, Palestinians had a sense of their enemy, and even with all their political differences, Palestinians across political factions were able to mobilise. Now, with the PA presiding, the post-Oslo divisions of areas A, B, C in the OPT, and the physical fragmentation of Palestinians, the approach to the occupation has been muddied. Political organising has become more and more localised. For example, a crisis in East Jerusalem or any other locality sees people who are able to mobilise on a short-term basis with a short-term goal. This is a deliberate characteristic of the Oslo Accord system which manifests itself in the form of the PA's strategy. El Kurd (2019) remarks that there has been a "professionalisation" of the PA and its institutions. With a very reductionist approach, a question like "why do Palestinian women face higher mortality rates during pregnancy," becomes a women's rights question and is muted solely to that level. There arises no question of the occupation, because the funding sources supporting the PA and the NGO apparatuses are tied to these niche kind of concerns.

The PA itself imposes a lot of this co-optation and wants to control the ways in which civil society organises. Any kind of organisation that happens outside of their control threatens their relationship with Israel, and threatens their status as an effective partner. Dana El Kurd (2019) discusses this process. If an organic group emerges, the PA targets a lot of the people in its leadership to become official employees of the PA. Suggestions are given as to where one should protest, areas for this are demarcated and a representative from the PA is also sent to participate in the protest. Therefore, local groups that might have a huge impact on organising people across different political lines are left scrambling for different objectives.

Another case of how the Palestinian queer movement is shaping up is that of increased organising of drag shows within the Palestinian communities in Israel ("historic Palestine"/"48 areas", as the Palestinians living in Israel call it) and a fewer, but increasing, number of shows in the West Bank. A closer look at the experiences of some Palestinian drag queens gives an understanding of this emerging aspect of the movement. A young Palestinian drag performer from Kawsar Zant, while performing in a club between Jaffa and Tel Aviv, wore a dress with the Palestinian flag stitched on it and did the *dabkeh* (traditional Palestinian dance form). She says "I am prouder than ever to be a Palestinian and a drag queen in this political situation . . . I am also challenging the old Palestinian way of thinking what men and women must be" (Ashly, 2019b) . Another performer, Cherrie Mota from Nablus, feels that as drag artists they have an important role to play in the Palestinian struggle. As LGBTQ communities constantly keep an eye on drag scenes across the world, Mota says, "If the Palestinian drag scene can be brought into the mainstream and under the lights, we can show the world our struggle in a different way, because they will see our struggle as LGBT people under occupation" (Ashly, 2019b). She performs only in Ramallah as she is not

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permitted to go to Jerusalem or Haifa due to the permit regime imposed by Israel on Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza. Elias Wakeem, aka Madam Tayoush, is another Palestinian drag artist who performs in Israel and explains a routine practice in their performance of having the audience participate in calling out letters after them of the Arabic word *ehtilal* (occupation). Wakeem says:

> *It was a way to make people realise that despite you seeing this drag queen on stage, this drag queen is not going to forget who she is. And she will always remind you about what you are doing in this country . . . even when I do drag and the song and show are not directly talking about politics or Palestine, just in the fact that it is happening within the Palestinian community is a statement on its own – not only to the Israelis or to the world, but to our own Palestinian community. (Ashly, 2019b)*

All these experiences echo what the small but growing number of Palestinian queer voices have been raising: that their struggle is intrinsically linked to that of the Palestinian liberation struggle and hence their activities are political in every sense, with sexuality, patriarchy and colonialism engaging at several levels.

As Sima Shakhsari writes:

> *Shuttling between life and death, the transgender refugee is caught between biopolitics and necropolitics, where her body is produced and managed through religious, medical, psychological, and geopolitical discourses, and her death is sanctioned in the state of exception as a refugee . . . and as transgender. (Quoted in Amar & El Shakry, 2013, p. 333)*

This can be understood as echoed in the experience of a queer Palestinian. It is through these inconsistencies and fractures that resistance in the form of anti-pinkwashing activism emerges. Given this background, it has been found that scholars from this region (West Asia in general) do not employ queer studies as a strange new concept to be applied on indigenous underpinnings. Rather, the gender dynamics, social struggles, sectarianisms and political economies of the region interplay with the multiple forms of domination that the region has experienced – colonial, cultural, geopolitical – and from this emerges activism, resistance and theory itself.

Queer theory needs to be expanded to include historical studies of desire and militancy. In condensing political agency to a vague, simply performative understanding, Western discourses ignore the relevance of class in exploring the sexual ambits of the various conceptualisations within political-economic frameworks. It has always been the hegemonic imperialist power that has chosen the particular bodies and sexualities that ought to be "saved," as well as those "homophobic" races (in this case, Arabs) who ought to be "civilised." Assisting this arrangement is the brutal system of masculinity of the neoliberal regime (PA-Israel) in the OPT. This makes it even more challenging to move further than the Western discourse on sexuality and its fundamental, homo–hetero binary, which is a result of colonial epistemology.

Soheil Asefi (2019) writes about his experience while visiting Manhattan half a decade after the historic Stonewall protests took place, and recalls it being entirely appropriated by "pink-capitalism" (p. 130). He suggests that the integration of queer bodies into the

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mainstream fixed notion of homonormativity can be a subject of study in radical queer theory, but it needs to engage with aspirations of people from exile and the neoliberal Western hegemony. The commodification of queer culture enables neoliberal actors to enforce Western frameworks of sexuality, which happens under the guise of "human rights" being exported to non-Western countries.

Anti-pinkwashing activism is up against a network of international power formations, while grappling with a politics of sexuality and belonging that goes beyond the dominant patterns of identity politics. In doing so, it strives to formulate a non-commodified critical understanding of gender, settler colonialism, imperialism, neoliberalism, sovereignty, displacement, citizenship, sexuality and belonging. The Oslo-led NGO-isation of the Palestinian liberation movement has resulted in commodification of activism as well. This acts as a constant challenge to keep Western hegemonic ideas of sexuality – in terms of the homo–hetero binary – from becoming an intrinsic part of the wider concerns of power and dominance.

Final Reflections on the Neoliberal Space of Palestine–Israel and Queer Activism Within

Palestinian society since the Oslo years can be characterised as having two essential features, a labour force dependent on the PA for its employment activities and a capitalist class enveloped into Israel's occupational mechanisms through the institution and state-building activities of the PA. In the West Bank specifically, recent years have shown a development model being adopted that intends to further bring together the Israeli and Palestinian economies by increasingly focusing on export-run industrial zones. This neoliberal turn of events enables stark polarisation of wealth and widening poverty in the region. Adam Hanieh (2013) explains this by highlighting data from the West Bank suggesting that real per-capita GDP saw its fastest growth in a decade as measured in 2010, yet this overlapped with unemployment rates remaining constant, also being one of the highest across the globe. A recent report from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) suggests that the total fiscal loss as borne by the PA from 2000 to 2017 was 47.7 billion dollars; a figure that, according to the same report, would have been enough to twice write off the Palestinian government's deficit in its budget in the same period of time (UNCTAD, 2019). This has led to a predominantly credit- and debt-based growth system with spending on services and real estate. A consequence of this is how the masses who participate in this political-economic arrangement, and are increasingly caught in a complex of monetary equations, envision their ability for social struggle. The individualisation seen in Palestinian society comes from these dynamics that keep most of the people entangled in individual debt, rather than allowing the prospect of popular resistance building up again.

In order to rebuild itself, the Palestinian resistance movement has to address questions of class that the Oslo peace process tacitly sowed and confront the thriving positioning of elites that have benefited from arrangements of the occupation. With the ever-increasing gap between the rich and poor in the West Bank, the past few years have seen an emergence of protests, specifically aimed at the role of the PA in the deteriorating economic conditions. Nevertheless, it is challenging for these emerging spurts of movements to gain

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stronger traction as questions of class are suppressed by questions of the need for national unity, and the two are presented as separate from one another.

In this light, pinkwashing, as a discourse and a process, is not only a homosexual question, nor even one that co-opts homosexuals to meet biopolitical ends. More than just about sexual identities, pinkwashing is a robust expression of the monitoring and classification of identity in a more and more homonationalist world order that gauges nationalism and nationhood based on the treatment of homosexuals. Anti-pinkwashing efforts must therefore interrogate and challenge any smooth, simple configuration of homosexual/queer solidarities. The queer Palestinian, irrespective of their geographical location in the fragmented land of Palestine–Israel, is constantly yearning to be at home. A conceptualisation of home in this case is one that is in continuous contention with the idea of nation, homeland, sexuality and gender identity – all of which are heavily influenced by the workings of the market, settler colonialism, commodification of the body and realisations of desire.

NOTES

1. The Balfour Declaration was a letter from the then British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour to Lionel Walter Rothschild, a towering figure of the British Jewish community. The content of this letter was a declaration by Britain of its aim to establish a "national home" for the Jewish people in Palestine.
2. This system transferred power to rule over the territories previously controlled by Germany, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire, and Bulgaria, to the victors of World War I. The declared purpose of this system was to let the war victors administer the freshly emerging states until they became independent. Palestine was an exception in this system, as the aim of the British Mandate was to design the conditions for the installation of a Jewish "national home."
3. Edward Said's books *The end of the peace process* and *Peace and its discontents: Essays on Palestine in the Middle East peace process* are of particular significance here. As well as his article "The Morning After," published in the London Review of Books, where he terms the Oslo agreement an "instrument of Palestinian surrender, a Palestinian Versailles."
4. This slogan has contending origins. Edward Said in his book *The question of Palestine*, Rashid Khalidi in his book *Palestinian identity*, among several other prominent intellectuals, associate it with Israel Zangwill, a Zionist leader and a close aide of Theodor Herzl, popularly known as the father of modern political Zionism. A counter-argument is provided by some historians, Diana Muir being one, who associate the early use of this slogan to Christian clergymen calling for the revival of Israel.

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